



WILL I HAVE A HEALTHY BABY?

Genetic Counseling

If you are pregnant or thinking about having a baby, you may have questions about birth defects or other health problems.

Anyone can have a child with a birth defect or genetic disorder, and some reasons could be that:

- Medical problems run in some families
- Some genetic disorders are more common in certain ethnic / racial groups, for example:
 - Whites (Northern European) – CYSTIC FIBROSIS
 - Greeks, Italians, and Southeast Asians – THALASSEMIA
 - African Americans – SICKLE CELL ANEMIA
 - Ashkenazi Jews – TAY-SACHS DISEASE
- Drugs, alcohol or other medications were used during pregnancy

Even though sometimes we find a reason why, the cause of many birth defects is unknown.

Genetic counseling may help you:

- Better understand your chances of giving birth to a child with a birth defect or genetic disorder
- Answer questions and discuss medical concerns about your “family tree”
- Understand your choices for finding and treating birth defects or health problems in your baby
- Get accurate, up-to-date information about genetic disorders, birth defects and available testing
- Plan for the care of a child born with a birth defect or other health problems

The genetics doctor and genetic counselor will respect your feelings and beliefs.

Genetic counseling may be most helpful if:


- You are pregnant or want to become pregnant and want to learn about testing for birth defects or genetic conditions
- You are pregnant and tests show the baby may have a problem
- You have a family history of a genetic disorder or birth defect
 - For example: Down syndrome, a bleeding disorder, cystic fibrosis, spina bifida (open spine), or muscular dystrophy
- You are worried that your medical condition could be passed on to your child
- You have had 3 or more miscarriages or cannot become pregnant
- You and your partner are closely related by blood (like first cousins)
- You have used alcohol or drugs during your pregnancy
- You are taking medicines for a health condition and are pregnant or want to become pregnant
- You are concerned about being exposed to radiation or chemicals

After the counseling, a review of what was discussed can be sent to you, your healthcare provider, or other family members at *your request*.

In Washington State, Genetic Counseling is available to all who want it. Each clinic sets its own fees, but can help you if you cannot afford the counseling session.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your primary care provider or local genetics clinic for assistance. To find the nearest genetics clinic in Washington State, either look on the Washington State Department of Health – Genetics Services Section website, <http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/InfantsChildrenandTeens/HealthandSafety/GeneticServices.aspx>, or call 253-395-6741.

This publication is available on the Washington State Department of Health Website, <http://here.doh.wa.gov>.

Produced in collaboration with:  **Health**

This fact sheet was originally developed by the Pacific Northwest Regional Genetics Group, which is no longer active, and was updated by the Western States Genetic Services Collaborative (www.westernstatesgenetics.org). The Western States Genetic Services Collaborative is supported by a grant from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration. Genetic Services Branch, MCH Project # U22MC03961.